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Impegno, National and Transnational Identities in *Il Politecnico* and *Sud* (1945-47)

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Impegno, National and Transnational Identities in Il Politecnico and Sud (1945-47)

Long neglected by critical literature and historians, the Neapolitan journal *Sud* (1945-47) shared similar aims and objectives with the more famous *Il Politecnico*, although the two journals were inserted into and connected with lively yet different cultural environments and networks, which crucially influenced their outputs. Most notably, both journals paid significant attention towards politically committed literary and essay translations. By intertwining the analysis of the journals' articles and translations with the editors' published and unpublished correspondence, the article reassesses the journals' relationship and illuminates the *engagement* of the two editorial boards through translations. The analysis of the two intellectual networks and projects will re-establish the relevance of *Sud* in stimulating a transnational dialogue and will reconsider the role of translation in shaping the editors' political identities. Finally, the article offers a geo-cultural perspective on post-WWII Italian *impegno* by charting its multiple, both national and transnational, identities.

Keywords: P.C.I.; *Il Politecnico*; Elio Vittorini; Pasquale Prunas; Pierre Bourdieu; social network theory; translation.

Introduction

Immediately after the fall of the Fascist dictatorship and the end of WWII, many lively but often short-lived journals flooded the Italian periodical scene. On their pages, they were modelling a notion of *impegno* (political commitment) that was not always monolithic in ideological terms.¹ Their aim was to establish a committed yet autonomous relationship between intellectuals and politics, as emblematically advocated by Elio Vittorini's *Il Politecnico* (1945-47) in his debate with the Italian Communist Party (P.C.I.) leader Palmiro Togliatti. This intention was shared by *Sud*, a more peripheral journal, published in Naples between November 1945 and 1947. Edited by an unknown intellectual in his twenties – Pasquale Prunas –² *Sud* lasted for only seven issues. The fortnightly magazine³ put forward the idea of an intellectual who, being both militant and educator, was able freely to join ethics

and aesthetics (Prunas 1945, 2). *Sud* covered topical subjects related to politics, literature, the arts, theatre, music and cinema, contained previously unpublished short stories and poems, and, most notably, many translations from Soviet, Greek, French, German and Anglo-American literature, in a similar way to what the more famous weekly *Il Politecnico* had been doing since September 1945.

By charting the relationship between *Sud* and *Il Politecnico*, and the connections between intellectuals based in Naples and Milan respectively, this article aims firstly to re-establish the broader significance of Prunas's cultural project in order to take *Sud* out of its isolated position within critical literature. Scholars have long neglected the Neapolitan journal,⁴ and until now have mainly analysed the journal either as a publishing venture on its own right, with the risk of adopting slightly apologetic tones (De Costanzo 1994), or have inserted it within the strictly Neapolitan artistic (Picone Petrusa 1991) and literary (Striano 2006) domain, thus potentially diminishing the (trans)national relevance of its intense, albeit brief, period of activity. Secondly, by bringing into greater focus the cultural discourses that, through translations, were both produced and provoked by and around *Il Politecnico* and *Sud*, the article aims to reveal the political significance of translations in shaping and fostering the editors' *impegno*.

To this end, the article intertwines the analysis of the journals' articles and paratexts of translations, and the editors' published and unpublished correspondence,⁵ by drawing on a composite sociological framework. Most specifically, as suggested by Bottero and Crossley (2011), it will combine field analysis (Bourdieu 1992) with social network analysis, unveiling tangible sites of collaboration, developed within and by the two literary journals. This allows the elucidation of the fruitful contacts between intellectuals located in Northern and Southern intellectual *milieux*, as well as highlighting the role of unexpected agents (such as the encounter with American officers in occupied Naples). Furthermore, by drawing on the

‘relational, interactive, and process-oriented’ (Werner and Zimmermann 2006, 38) perspective of the *histoire croisée*, the article will conceive translation and, along the same lines, ‘transnational’ relationships, not as a hierarchic and static process but as a dynamic process which embeds, at different stages and to different degrees, the cultural discourses produced in the source context within the dynamics of the target culture. Their fertile interrelationship can prove strategic in enhancing the ideological controversy of specific translation choices. As we shall see in the last section of the article, this is precisely what happens with the inclusion of the Sartre-French Communist Party *querelle* in the Italian context by both *Il Politecnico* and *Sud*.

Therefore, the article will show that, despite major differences in terms of symbolic capital and the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 72) of their editorial staff, both journals – *Il Politecnico* and *Sud* – embodied alternative ways of conceiving the relationship between culture and politics in relation to the Italian Communist Party. Their cosmopolitanism, often deplored by the P.C.I in its cultural guidelines as opposed to the development of a national popular tradition, was instead strategic in defining their intellectual identity and in carving their position within both the literary and the political field. At the same time, the different status of their editors and the diverse social and cultural spaces in which the two journals operated suggested unequal spaces of manoeuvre. In its eclectic relationships with Neapolitan cultural operators – both those who were left-wing politically oriented and those more conservative and Catholic – as well as with foreign intellectuals, in some instances *Sud* intended to propose an even less conformist alternative to the Communist guidelines than *Il Politecnico*, as we will further explore in the last section of this article.

Il Politecnico/Sud

In an article published in *Pesci Rossi* in 1947, the journalist and writer Michele Prisco presented *Sud* as a group of young intellectuals, whose spontaneous and radical need for a

proactive intellectual engagement with society failed because of its pompously didactic and more insular and parochial imitation of *Il Politecnico*:

On the other side [of Neapolitan intellectual groups, editorial note], there are the young men gathered around Prunas, who, for a few years, has been giving life to a journal, *Sud*, where the honest need for a more active participation by intellectuals in society is submerged by a pedantic and often provincial imitation of Vittorini's *Politecnico*. Therefore, frequently, this small group of radical *scapigliatura* dilutes its intelligence with rhetoric [...] (Prisco 1947, 23).⁶

Prisco was, at the same time, implicitly suggesting not only the isolated position of *Sud* within the Croce-aligned intellectual circles in Naples,⁷ but most interestingly a dependency of the Neapolitan journal on that of Vittorini. By reconstructing through archival materials the genealogy of *Sud*, we will challenge Prisco's judgement and reassess the autonomous, yet intersecting, development of the Neapolitan journal in relation to *Il Politecnico*.

The two journals shared in the long term a continuity of themes, both in terms of content and graphics. In an unpublished project – found in Prunas' private archive – that was to be released after 1947, Prunas was considering the potential inclusion of sections on architecture, city planning and design, of reports from Italian Southern regions – edited by a young Andrea Camilleri, but also by the neorealist poet Rocco Scotellaro and by Ugo Vittorini, Elio's brother – as well as reports from North Africa, South America and Mexico. The latter, in particular, would have been in the same tone as the more famous world *reportages* in *Il Politecnico*. If it had come to fruition, this format would thus have clearly strengthened the direct and indirect connections with the 'polytechnic' approach of Vittorini (Lupo 2011) and the Milanese journal. Furthermore, the use of modern graphics and fonts in the layout, and a sober yet effectively integrated use of photos and cartoons, particularly the caricatural drawings by the German artist George Grosz, and those by Prunas himself – who

became a renowned graphic designer in his professional career after the *Sud* venture – recall the interaction between texts and images that Albe Steiner was fine-tuning in the pages of *Il Politecnico*.⁸

However the *Sud*'s relationship to *Il Politecnico* is not as ancillary as Prisco suggested in his article. First of all, the unpublished materials found in Prunas's private archive allow us to date the cultural project of *Sud* back to 15 October 1944, which was prior to the launch and publication of *Il Politecnico*. At this time, Prunas was already drawing up the rough outline of the first issue of the journal. This suggests shared affinities instead of a hierarchic relationship between the two publishing ventures. Secondly, despite the different symbolic capital carried by the two journal editors - the unknown and young Prunas on the one hand -⁹ and the more famous writer and intellectual Vittorini on the other,¹⁰ the two editorial staffs engendered a mutual collaboration. Some of the contributors to *Sud*, namely the journalists Tommaso Giglio and Antonio Ghirelli, moved to Milan, where they both represented the Milanese editorial staff of the Neapolitan journal and contributed with articles and translations to *Il Politecnico*.¹¹

Furthermore, the Neapolitan journal was highly praised by the intellectual networks outside Naples: Giglio himself, a journalist at the P.C.I.'s newspaper *L'Unità* in Milan and already in touch with Vittorini and *Il Politecnico*, in 1946 informed Prunas that *Sud* had gained the esteem of Milanese and Roman intellectuals, such as Libero Bigiaretti, Leonardo Sinisgalli, and Luchino Visconti, for being an innovative publication.¹² More significantly, not only cultural agents operating within the Milanese intellectual circles appreciated the graphics and the quality of the articles, but also recognized *Sud* as a potential ally in the battle for that 'renewal' of Italian culture, as suggested by Vittorini in his *Politecnico*'s manifesto (1945). This is demonstrated by the proposal for a collaboration between the two journals sent to Prunas by another contributor of *Il Politecnico*, Giuseppe Trevisani, in October 1947.

Although the proposal came in the months of the final crisis of *Il Politecnico*, when Vittorini's journal was desperately attempting to find allies, this should not diminish the significance of the letter. Trevisani was not seeking a generic connection, but a closer collaboration in order to strengthen *Il Politecnico*'s position towards popular culture, in the name of the specific expertise in cinema shown by the Neapolitan journal:

Dear Prunas, this issue of *Poli* would like to pay homage, typographically, to *Sud*. We talk much about you and your journal with Giglio, with Ghirelli, with the other friends and *compagni*, who, as you know, work in the 'clean' editorial staffs. [...]. Why don't you do something for *Politecnico*? While I am writing, Elio is not in Milan, so I cannot ask his opinion. However, I think that you could definitely send us a letter from Naples or an essay on cinema, as we don't talk much about it and it would be good instead if we talked about it.¹³

The final consecration of the Neapolitan journal came from another intellectual and contributor to *Il Politecnico*, Franco Fortini, in October 1947, after the seventh and last issue of *Sud* was published. In Fortini's article, *Sud* was praised as a more radical journal than its Northern counterparts which were more used to compromise, for it intertwined 'will to action, pure anarchism, rebellion and concerns against rhetoric' (Fortini 1947, 21). According to Fortini, if this eclectic attitude was somehow exaggerated, it nonetheless fully revealed the tone of disagreement that *Sud* was putting forward against those somehow 'incoherent' (*ibid.*), Milanese, Turinese or Florentine 'myths' (*ibid.*) of Resistance elaborated in the aftermath of WWII. Notwithstanding the differences between *Sud* and *Il Politecnico*, Fortini was here suggesting a shift of perspective to embrace the revolutionary tone of the Neapolitan intellectuals. The implicit reference was most probably to the Vittorini-Togliatti *querelle*.

What Fortini found most relevant in the journal was indeed the translation of French essays, and in particular those by Jean-Paul Sartre, Georges Mounin, Vercors and Emmanuel Mounier, as controversial voices and symbols of the opposition between Marxism and

Existentialism that was developing within European culture and the European communist parties. This alternative perspective on French essay writing immediately linked *Sud* and *Il Politecnico* within the then current political and literary debates,¹⁴ thus offering stimulating elements for our analysis, which I will develop in the last section of this article.

Translations, *Habitus* and Networks

As stressed by Fortini, both *Sud* and *Il Politecnico* crucially shared a common interest in foreign cultures, as a way to broaden and challenge the Italian cultural scene. *Sud*'s editors suggested that the Italian literary tradition, particularly Hermeticism, was to be called into question by an interest in political life and a new attention to the social dimension of literature, as collectively and not individually perceived, which characterised the then contemporary French (namely Aragon and Éluard), American and Soviet poetry (Giglio 1946a, 2). However, this cosmopolitan disposition that was to influence the developing Italian literary landscape was framed in different ways, in accordance with the *habitus* of the editorial staffs of both journals and the extension of the social networks to which they belonged.

The position of *Il Politecnico* in the literary and political field of post-WWII Italy was clearly more central and well defined, thanks to Vittorini's status as novelist and anti-fascist, the support of Einaudi, a politically committed publishing house, and the journal's initial allegiance with the P.C.I. (Ajello 1979, 134). This allowed a relative ease, drawing on Vittorini's symbolic capital, in establishing connections with intellectuals within and outside Italy, which placed *Il Politecnico* in dialogue with many other foreign literary magazines such as *Critique*, founded and edited in 1946 by Georges Bataille, with American publishers like James Laughlin, with the Cuban revolutionary magazine *Orígenes* (1944-56),¹⁵ and, obviously, with Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* (1944-).

The publication of translations in *Il Politecnico* followed a twofold direction, since foreign literature appeared to be instrumental in enhancing both the cosmopolitan and anti-fascist narratives that the journal wanted to offer to the readers. On the one hand, as recalled also by Baldini (2016), in the weekly issues, literary translations functioned as a corollary of the *reportages* on foreign cultures, providing a sort of literary anthology which complemented the report by being also graphically part of it. The interest in foreign poems and novels was thus part of a wider plan, aiming to offer to the readership a worldwide cultural outlook within which contemporary Italian culture should be put in dialogue and consequently reassessed.

On the other hand, the publication of foreign authors was generally didactic (Esposito 2015, 224) and notably politically oriented. Firstly, all poets and novelists were presented through a short editorial note as *engagés* authors, stressing – even misleadingly, when introducing the politically more conservative T.S. Eliot (Eliot 1945, 1) – their alignment to the Communist and working class ideals, or their revolutionary actions, as – for instance – the participation of Stephen Spender in the Spanish civil war (Spender 1945, 3). Secondly, their political status attracted more attention than their literary accomplishments, thus implicitly drawing similarities with contemporary Italian intellectuals and their participation in the Resistance movement. In this sense, as suggested by Vittoria (1996, 1122), the publication in instalments of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway was strategic in the development of a collective anti-fascist narrative.¹⁶

Although graphically framed in a similar way to the weekly *Il Politecnico*,¹⁷ the use of translations in *Sud* appears to be somehow less explicit in its political intention, and more controversial and multi-layered. Due to the small relevance of Prunas's symbolic capital and the major issues and difficulties within even the national distribution chain,¹⁸ transnational networks were clearly reduced, but not non-existent. Significantly, *Sud* declared in its

manifesto that *Sud* (South) should not be understood either as a local and traditionally connoted dimension or as a ‘political geography’ (Prunas 1945, 2), but as an anti-rhetorical stance that involved Naples as well as Europe and the whole world. As such, since the very beginning, Prunas cast the journal in a wider space of reception than the traditional Neapolitan one, thus virtually inserting *Sud* within an avant-garde horizon beyond the national borders. Hence, in his correspondence, Prunas was actively seeking connections and exchanges with French, Mexican and Anglophone radical journals, and was eventually able to start a mutual exchange with the American political and literary quarterly *Partisan Review*.¹⁹ This transnational attitude is demonstrated also by the further project of the journal, entitled *Sud giornale europeo*, which was to have included – according to Prunas’s sketches – foreign editorial staff, with letters from Paris (Simone de Beauvoir), Berlin (Ernest Wiereck), London (Stephen Spender) and New York (William Weaver).²⁰ Interestingly, these letters would have been published in the original language, thus signalling the intention to address a multilingual readership also outside of Italy. Finally, the presence of American officers based in Naples after 1944, such as the translator William Weaver,²¹ allowed unexpected contacts and publishing opportunities for such an artisan and small magazine, like the translation of Dylan Thomas’s poems, and in 1946 of one of Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (‘East Coker’, anticipated by Cecchi’s translation, published in *Poesia* in January 1945).

Foreign culture played a crucial role for the journal, especially in allowing it to move beyond more stagnant domestic literary contributions, particularly in the field of fiction writing. These were often proposed by the Neapolitan and friends’ circles of the journal, most of whom (e.g. Giuseppe Marotta, Raffaele La Capria) were gravitating, from a thematic and stylistic viewpoint, around a ‘generic sentimentalism’ and ‘Naples’ pre-packaged emotional appeal’ (Torriglia 2002, 129). This limit was also outlined by Giglio in his correspondence with Prunas in December 1945:

I would have given less space to the short stories written by our friends and much more to the foreign ones. I am saying this, since our friends have provided old short stories, apart from Ghirelli, that from the very beginning have not been very innovative as far as their writing is concerned.²²

However, the actual editing of the translations engendered some controversy in the results, due to the difference of *habitus* within the editorial group that Giglio's remark signalled. On the one side of the editorial staff, the Milanese group (Giglio and Ghirelli) shared with *Il Politecnico* a systematically cosmopolitan and politically charged attitude, with the purpose of creating a geo-political consonance with Italian culture. This was notably the case with the translation in June 1946 of contemporary Greek poets who fought in the Greek Civil War, and of French WWII prisoners, set to enhance the sense of a European humanitarian brotherhood against a sterile formal conception of literature. In the same pages, there was also space for an unpublished poem by Lenin, focussing on the propagandistic function of poetry for its revolutionary tone: the timing of this publication echoed the translation, only a month earlier, of another work by Lenin in *Il Politecnico*.

On the other side, the section on foreign literature was more substantially edited by two other contributors, Mario Stefanile and Raffaele La Capria, whose political and aesthetic attitudes were quite distant from the Milanese *entourage*. Significantly, from a political viewpoint, Stefanile was already a journalist employed by the conservative Neapolitan newspaper *Il Mattino* and had already contributed to a liberal, literary-oriented weekly *Belvedere* (Striano 2006, 52), which was initially supported by the Neapolitan fascist federation. Moreover, Stefanile belonged to an earlier generation than that of *Sud*; he admired *ermetismo*, while at the same time appreciated contemporary American literature, read through Vittorini's *Americana*. The less radical contribution that Stefanile could have brought

to *Sud*, in accordance with these dispositions and his Fascist militancy, is emblematically suggested in a letter that Giglio sent to Prunas in September 1945:

Dear Pasqualino, I have prepared some materials to send to you, but I received news concerning *Sud* telling me things about the journal to which I cannot subscribe. I found out that Mario Stefanile is to be editor-in-chief of *Sud*. But I also know that the attitude of *Sud* will be very conservative and bourgeois. If this is the line, I must take back my materials since I don't feel like collaborating with a journal which works against the working class.²³

And this suspicion that *Sud* might be turned into a conservative voice, far from the communist ideals, is reiterated by Antonio Ghirelli from Milan, on 13 September 1945:

Someone told us that you are with Mario Stefanile, with Duddù La Capria, with Franco Rosi. These are the names of our best friends, but not the names with whom we can be put side by side on a page. [...] They are against us, against the Party, against the discipline, the hope that we freely chose. [...] If you are publishing either the usual scepticism by Duddù, or the vulgar despair by Mario, we cannot consider *Sud* as a journal of which we can be part.²⁴

Stefanile left the group after the fourth issue, due to a disagreement with one of the editors, Gianni Scognamiglio (De Costanzo 1994, 12n), while the collaboration with La Capria started with the second issue (15 December 1945) and lasted until the end of the venture. La Capria's editorial work, assisted by Giglio and Ghirelli, along with Scognamiglio and Ennio Mastrostefano, was marked by his own idiosyncratic interests in Anglophone literature, which were not necessarily in line with the foreign intellectuals (such as Hemingway) who contemporary Italian authors were adopting as both their literary and political mentors.²⁵ La Capria's own perception of the relationship between literature and politics was certainly progressive, but not uncritically ideological. From this perspective, La Capria's first essay on

the English novelist Christopher Isherwood is already significant, as the Italian author analysed Isherwood's fragmentary representations of political identities (Nazi as well as leftist and Communist), thus signalling the search for a more nuanced and not ideologically static literary realism. In reviewing *Goodbye to Berlin*, La Capria not only praised the novel for the fluid style and the masterly theatrical dialogues, but appreciated in particular the *implicit* revolutionary tone, which helped to give more cohesion and literary tension to the book than a propagandistic approach would have done (La Capria 1945, 6). This essay needs to be read in parallel with that on Hemingway, in which La Capria criticizes *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and especially the description of the main character, Robert Jordan, for being too explicitly action and romance-driven, as 'in a manner different from Joyce, who had described his characters' inner life, Hemingway focused instead on "organic life"' (La Capria 1946b, 8). This materialistic characterisation not only generated an entropy of actions which disrupted the soundness of the plot and led to an apocalyptic perspective on history, but more significantly ended in the main character's political ineffectiveness. According to La Capria, Jordan's portrait and his 'generous' idealism was similar to 'the destiny of many Communist intellectuals' (*ibid.*). In a similar vein, the presentation of contemporary English poetry, namely that of Eliot, Auden, Spender and Day Lewis, reveals an admiration for these poets, for their ability to react against an individualistic aesthetic and to propose progressive social behaviour that called for a more optimistic attitude towards life and an opposition to social injustices (La Capria 1946a, 3). Significantly, La Capria assessed, in not strictly ideological terms, the English poetry's political concerns within the timeframe and exigencies of the Spanish Civil War (before its move towards mysticism), reaffirming, against Marxist critics, the need for a stylistic appreciation of its traditionally bourgeois device of the poetic form.

For their controversial presentations, translations of French literature can be read as emblematic of the different cultural and political dispositions, namely the more sentimentalist

and the more *engagé*, which needed to cohabit within the same editorial staff. With regard to the role of poetry in the Resistance movement, when discussing the participation of Pierre Emmanuel, Scognamiglio (1945, 3) posits him within a Catholic horizon and comments on his effectiveness in showing neo-romantic empathy for human suffering and collective irrationality. In clearly different terms, Giglio (1946b) measured the relevance of Éluard as a poet in accordance with the latter's strictly political salience as a left-wing cultural figure. From a similar perspective, French essays were – as anticipated by Fortini's remarks – the most relevant of *Sud*'s translations for our investigation. Through these one can measure the political positioning of the journal, as the next and last section of this article will elucidate.

Translation and *Impegno*

The debate on Existentialism was highly topical in 1947. The difficult relationship between Sartre and the French Communist Party also had consequences also on the Italian scene, as the P.C.I was fighting against the perceived subjective individualism of Sartre's Existentialism (see footnote 12). This opposition was crucial in *Il Politecnico*: as recalled by Tosatti (2010, 529-30), the reception of Sartre's theories in the journal (16th issue, in particular), and the mutual exchange with *Les Temps Modernes* were strategic for Vittorini to strengthen his position in the struggle for the 'new culture', the journal's manifesto, and in his debate with Marxist intellectuals. The result of this exchange was an escalation of the debate itself, culminating in the famous polemic between Vittorini and the P.C.I secretary, Palmiro Togliatti,²⁶ in which *Il Politecnico*'s cosmopolitanism was called into question, while Sartre's positions were still defended by Vittorini (1947, 105).

The publication of Sartre's essay 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in *Sud* needs to be located precisely in this context of political and intellectual debates that it had engendered in France and then Italy. The essay, quite tentatively translated by La Capria as "Ragioni e verità dell'Esistenzialismo/Reasons and Truths of Existentialism", was introduced by a short

note, probably written by La Capria himself (1992, 20), outlining how the philosophy was not superficially nihilist, but intrinsically ethical. According to La Capria, the Existentialist search for a moral defence reflected nonetheless the picture of an exhausted and bored society. The choice of the translated essay therefore confirmed the typically unorthodox *habitus* of the journal, always balancing diverse and less conformist perspectives. However, the publication was highly criticized by Communist intellectuals and leftist readers of *Sud* and was perceived, in line with the P.C.I.'s guidelines, as rather conservative. Prunas had to intervene with an editorial note (1947) to publicly defend his publishing choice. This was the occasion to adopt an indirect strategy that, moving from a virtually transnational perspective, would cast *Sud* within the national political debate. In line with Vittorini's response to Togliatti, Prunas began by defending the autonomy of culture, criticizing the orthodox and rigid interpretation of cultural expressions by progressive intellectuals (Liberal, Catholic, and especially Communist) – an interpretation he labelled as 'fascist' (1947, 3). Furthermore, in a similar, but strategically different way to what Vittorini had done with the 5th P.C.I.'s National Congress and its agenda for the inclusion of all intellectuals, Prunas preferred not to engage with national debates. These might have signalled, in fact, a proximity with the Italian Communist intellectuals, Prunas called instead on Stalin's speech at the Central Committee, in which the leader of the Soviet Union claimed that 'dialectics was key in Marxism' (1947, 3). This clearly positioned *Sud* in contraposition to the guidelines of the P.C.I and established an indirect connection with Vittorini's cultural strategy. The importance of Vittorini's letter to Togliatti in the formation of Prunas' intellectual identity is also demonstrated by the fact that, in the unpublished project for *Sud giornale europeo di cultura*, Prunas was planning to publish Vittorini's "Politica e cultura" as the opening article, and thus in the strategic position of manifesto. At a further level, Prunas widened the perspective of the negative reception of "Ragioni e verità dell'esistenzialismo", by drawing comparisons between *Sud* editors and

foreign intellectuals who had been critical of Marxism, particularly Brecht, Éluard, Dos Passos and Malraux. Hence, through his letter, Prunas elaborated a strategic narrative apt to draw, on paper, a connection with foreign intellectuals in order to carve his own critical position. This eventually would give him some legitimacy within the national debate, too.

Ultimately, this editorial note was also the occasion to defend the journal from the more general criticism that its editors were unclear about what themes and approaches they wanted to adopt, and overly reliant of their non-conformist and continuous – but potentially sterile – questioning. The somehow conflicting dispositions of the two editorial groups that fertilized the Neapolitan journal – as the case of French translations has vividly suggested – inevitably produced multiple perceptions of Prunas's political positioning. These span the definition of 'Catholic-socialism' suggested by La Capria (Striano 2006, 149) to that of 'Communist' provided by Patroni-Griffi, in an unpublished letter sent to Prunas in 1946. However, as outlined also by Striano (*ibid.*), Prunas's reflections did not limit themselves to a traditionally Catholic perspective. More specifically, Prunas was animated by a Christian inclination, but in an endless, non-conformist search for the truth. This search led the journal to become a heterogeneous platform of research, which questioned every orthodox approach and welcomed, amongst others, Sartre's existentialism as well as Lenin's poems and Catholic neo-romantic poetry. *Sud* thus occupied an eccentric position within leftist culture, a position which could not be safely included within the tangles of the Communist Party. Prunas was therefore putting forward in his journal a non-conformist intellectual attitude, which was – considering the different economic and symbolic capital – even more radical than that of *Il Politecnico*.

A further point to take into account when assessing *Sud*'s position within the political field of post-WWII is the fact that, while looking for financial supporters for the journal, Prunas and the other editors were approached by Mario Alicata, member of the P.C.I and

editor in Naples of the leftist journal *La Voce*.²⁷ As archival evidence suggests, the issue of establishing broader alliances with Southern intellectuals was being debated within the P.C.I., and the party leadership believed that it needed to involve progressive intellectuals who were not necessarily members of the party, in order to enlarge its influence in the South.²⁸ Yet the extent to which this interaction could take place in autonomous terms needs to be assessed. Alicata proposed some financing for *Sud* but only if the latter changed its non-conformist attitude with regard to the Party's guidelines. Prunas's refusal of the proposal is emblematic for two reasons: first, it demonstrated Prunas's need to maintain his political autonomy, and second it ratified the end of the journal. In a similar but more tragic way than Vittorini's *Il Politecnico*, *Sud* became increasingly isolated in local and broader contexts. On the one hand, the refusal of Alicata's financial offer further marginalized *Sud* within the leftist Neapolitan intellectual community. On the other, the lack of financial support prevented Prunas from publishing his journal and from distributing it outside Naples, across Italy and abroad. *Sud* was therefore gradually neglected, thus reaffirming the difficulties of developing alternative ways to the hegemonic power of the P.C.I. in Italian post-WWII leftist culture.

Conclusions

In trying to emancipate itself from the hegemonic influence of the P.C.I, *Sud* offered the example of a non-conformist project of cultural autonomy. It did so by adopting a wider European perspective on culture and literature and by strategically connecting with – but not superficially imitating – the narratives unfolded by Vittorini in *Il Politecnico* both at a national and transnational level. The lack of economic means and the intellectual isolation that *Sud* probably experienced in Naples²⁹ led the publishing venture to come to an end; but the journal represented an original contribution to the cultural scene of the immediate post-WWII period in Italy, a contribution which came from the geographical periphery but which

sought to interweave national and transnational cultural discourses in order to influence the centre of the intellectual debate.

In this regard, the strategic role played by the journal's translations in shaping its intellectual and political identities suggests the need to reconsider the intersection of transnational flows with Italian cultural history. These intersections turned out to be more significant than domestic exchange in unveiling specific realities and the relationships between national cultural hubs (in this case Neapolitan and Milanese). This eventually would help to offer a more complex picture of the process of the formation of intellectual identities.

Notes

¹ As Jennifer Burns (2001, 13) reminds us, the discussion on the concept of *impegno* was key in early post-WWII Italian journals, including *Il Politecnico* and *Rinascita* (1944 – 1991). The debate was strictly connected to the role that Italian intellectuals, in the particular moment of social and political change, should have undertaken to ‘capitalize on the sense, which the Resistance had seemed to signify, of a revolutionary surge powered by all classes working together’ (*ibid.*). As Burns demonstrates in her contribution, the concept of *impegno* was ‘inherently problematic’, thus not necessarily ‘a monological one, producing dogmatic, even axiomatic, statements about the social role of literature’ (*ibid.*).

² Sardinian born, Pasquale Prunas (1924-1985) founded *Sud* when he was only 21. After the failure of this publishing venture, in 1953 he moved to Milan where he worked as a renowned graphic designer for the first Italian magazine of photojournalism (*Le ore*) and then to Rome (*Il Messaggero*). For Prunas' biography, see also Picone Petrusa (1991, 58n) and De Costanzo (1994, 9).

³ At least in theory, as major financial issues made publication difficult and uncertain until the journal eventually had to cease publication in 1947. See Picone Petrusa (1991, 58-59n) and *Sud's* account book, reprinted in De Costanzo (1994, 31-34).

⁴ As also stressed by Di Costanzo (1994, 10), the reception of *Sud* has been influenced by two main factors. Firstly, Pasquale Prunas himself was very reluctant to discuss the experience after the end of the venture. Secondly, there has been a strategy of dismissal of the experiment of the journal by Anna Maria Ortese, the famous writer who collaborated to *Sud* but negatively portrayed the editorial group in her 1953 short story “Il silenzio della ragione/[The Silence of Reason]” (Ortese 1953). In the preface to the 1979 edition of the collection of short stories, Ortese confirmed this

perspective. Only in 1994, in *Le giacchette grigie della "Nunziatella"* (De Costanzo 1994, 5-6), did she offer a more balanced reappraisal of the *Sud* experience.

- ⁵ The correspondence of Pasquale Prunas is held in Rome by his sister, Renata. For Vittorini and *Il Politecnico*, the sources are held at APICE-University of Milan and Giulio Einaudi editore archive in Turin.
- ⁶ All translations of published and unpublished materials are mine, here and throughout. As a letter held in Prunas's archive witnesses, Prunas nevertheless sought the collaboration of Prisco, particularly by asking the Neapolitan writer for his unpublished short stories. On 14 May 1947, Prisco replied to Prunas, telling him that he would like to 'put aside his doubts' with regard to *Sud* by publishing one short story in the journal.
- ⁷ As recalled also by David Ward, 'Croce's influence on Italian culture was enormous and continued to be a source of inspiration into the postwar years' (1996, 84), particularly for intellectuals of the Action Party. In Naples, Croce's legacy was still strong, gravitating around such publishing outlets as *I Quaderni della Critica* (1945-51), and cultural institutions such as the Istituto per gli studi storici (founded in 1946). However, as evident on the pages of the journal, Croce did not represent the main reference point for the young intellectuals gathered around *Sud*, or at least for the editor-in-chief Prunas. Interestingly, no correspondence between or reference to Prunas and the Croces was found either at Prunas' private archive or at Fondazione e Biblioteca Benedetto Croce.
- ⁸ On this matter, see Picone Petrusa (1991, 36) for *Sud*, Stancarelli (2008) for the use of comics in *Il Politecnico*, Zanantoni (2013), more specifically on Steiner, and Rizzarelli (2007), more generally on Vittorini and the use of photography.
- ⁹ The young Prunas was relatively peripheral to the main Neapolitan intellectual circles. Carla De Riso (1914-2004), one of the editors of *Sud*, recalled in a conversation with Prunas' sister, Renata, who very kindly provided me with the transcript of the interview, that, when looking for collaborators, Prunas asked De Riso, an elegant woman in her thirties, to approach potential contributors on his behalf, since he doubted he would have been taken seriously by those intellectuals (Mario Stefanile, in particular). With Gianni Scognamiglio, Ennio Mastrostefano and Raffaele La Capria, instead, under the Fascist regime, Prunas collaborated with the university magazine *9 maggio* (Picone Petrusa 1991, 58n).
- ¹⁰ On the cultural, publishing and literary role of Vittorini, see at least Ferretti (1992), Panicali (1994), Bonsaver (2000), Esposito (2009) and Gasparotto (2010).
- ¹¹ Letter from Tommaso Giglio to Pasquale Prunas, February 1946: 'Do you want me to establish a Milanese editorial staff? But this was implicit, we are the Milanese editorial staff', my translation. Also De Costanzo (1994, 19n). There was also another editorial staff, represented by Giuseppe Patroni-Griffi in Rome (letter to Prunas by Patroni Griffi, dated 22 October 1945, partially in De Costanzo [1994, 12n]: 'I have nothing at all against establishing an editorial staff in Rome'). However, at the beginning, Patroni Griffi appeared less proactive than the Milanese group: apart

from sending some notes on theatre and music performances, he suggested waiting until the journal had gained a clearer perspective before contacting some Roman intellectuals. In this respect, Patroni Griffi stressed the need for the journal to be ‘elegant’, from a typographic viewpoint, and aimed at intellectual circles beyond the strictly regional ones, as fundamental conditions for its publishing success (letter sent to Prunas on 6 August 1945).

¹² Letters from Tommaso Giglio to Pasquale Prunas, sent in February 1946 (Prunas’ archive) and another, sine data, quoted also in De Costanzo (1994, 16).

¹³ Letter from Giuseppe Trevisani to Pasquale Prunas, 18 October 1947, my translation. Also in Picone Petrusa (1991, 58n), and then De Costanzo (1994, 12-13n).

¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between *Il Politecnico*, Marxism and Existentialism, see at least La Puma (1980) and Piccioni (1993).

¹⁵ As demonstrated by Vittorini’s correspondence held both at APICE (Milan) – in particular letters with Bataille (23 November 1946), Josè Rodriguez Feo (20 September 1947) –, and at the Einaudi Archive (State Archive, Turin), file Vittorini, James Laughlin to Elio Vittorini, 28 April 1947. See also Vittorini (1977).

¹⁶ As in the translation in Italian of the title “*Per chi suonano [sic] le campane*”, in order to strengthen the antifascist positioning of *Il Politecnico*’s contributors and recipients. In addition, the experience of the Spanish Civil War recalled in the novel echoed the years in which Vittorini wrote his *Conversazione in Sicilia* (1941), the novel that emblematically marked ‘the beginning of Vittorini’s own journey away from fascism’ (Ben-Ghiat 2001, 193). It should nonetheless be noted, with Bonsaver (2000, 89), that the actual writing of *Conversazione in Sicilia* was much more influenced by the style of Saroyan’s novels than that of Hemingway’s.

¹⁷ As outlined by Zancan (2009, 93), the monthly issues were very different in this regard and presented a more traditional graphic layout, in which contributions on foreign literatures were included as autonomous parts in the literary section of the journal.

¹⁸ *Sud* was actually published by Prunas himself, under the pseudonym of Angelo Semestene. As Prunas’s correspondence reveals, the journal was distributed by some agencies in Rome (Ferroni&Pizzi) and Milan (Menotti Libri and A.G. Marco) but was not distributed in newspaper kiosks. This was noticed by Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, who, in an unpublished letter to Prunas, on 18 July 1946, suggested instead distributing the journal, through kiosks, in the bigger cities, since, especially in Rome, readers were used to buy not only local newspapers, but journals published all around Italy).

¹⁹ This collaboration came unfortunately too late, as the letter was received on 16 December 1947. Prunas’ effort is nonetheless demonstrated by the wealth of letters found in his archive. Prunas actively sought collaboration with some American (*Science and Society* and *Briarcliff Quarterly*) and Mexican journals (*Cuadernos Mexicanos*, *Letras de Mexico*, *El Hijo Prodigio*) (also in Picone Petrusa [1991, 59n]), as well as with English radical independent publisher (Lawrence and

Wishart). Archival search has also enabled the unveiling of one request, dated 3 February 1947, for a monthly subscription by a bookshop in London (Mary Yeates, from Collett's), through a Turinese publishing agent (Piera Fasano) and letters for distribution purposes written in French and English (this one dated 1950, so three years after the formal closure of *Sud*). In an unpublished letter, dated 6 November 1947, the *Sud* contributor, Samy Fayad, told Prunas that the journal had attracted the attention of the Venezuelan daily newspaper, *El Nacional*.

²⁰ The unpublished sketches also allow us to acknowledge letters from Mexico (from one of the editors of *Quadernos Americanos* – possibly *Cuadernos Mexicanos*), from Buenos Aires (P.M. Bardi), from Bucharest (Silvio Guarnieri).

²¹ The encounter between William Weaver and Raffaele La Capria was romanticized by the latter as a casual meeting in a bookshop (see La Capria [1991]), then slightly rectified by Weaver himself (1993). In any case, the episode witnesses the ease with which the American soldiers received books from the US and the initiation of literary collaborations with Neapolitan intellectuals due to geographical proximity.

²² Tommaso Giglio to Pasquale Prunas, December 1945, Prunas Archive.

²³ Tommaso Giglio to Pasquale Prunas, September 1945, Prunas Archive.

²⁴ Antonio Ghirelli to Pasquale Prunas, 13 September 1945, Prunas Archive. Also in Picone Petrusa (1991, 58n).

²⁵ In a later note (De Costanzo 1994, 15n), La Capria himself pointed out that the unprejudiced and spontaneous realism of Isherwood was for him more inspirational than the 'progressive, yet sentimental, realism' of the master Hemingway, who appeared much less detailed and convincing.

²⁶ As I cannot deal extensively with this polemic, please see at least Luperini (1971), VV.AA. (1974), Fortini (1973), Muraca (1980).

²⁷ According to Picone Petrusa (1991, 58-59n), Luigi Compagnone recalled a meeting in which Prunas, Compagnone and Mastrostefano took part, with leftist politicians and editors at *La Voce*, such as Emilio Sereni, Mario Alicata, Luigi Amadesi, Lelio Porzio, Alberto Iacoviello, Mariantonietta Macciocchi and Paolo Ricci.

²⁸ Fondazione Gramsci, Rome (Fondo Mosca, Direzione Verbali, 9 April 1946).

²⁹ In this regard, a letter sent on 26 August 1947 by Prunas to the journalist, Enrico Emanuelli, is particularly revealing of the obstacles, namely the lack of publishing infrastructures and the skeptical attitude of most intellectuals, placed in the way of brand-new and unorthodox intellectual projects: 'Perhaps Giglio – better than I could do – had the opportunity to tell you of the many difficulties we met in doing a barely decent amount of work here in Naples, and more generally in the South of Italy. [...] Intellectuals are always isolated here in Naples, at least intellectuals aiming not to follow regional only paths. These intellectuals do not have a bourgeoisie who could, at certain times, think of them, give them the possibility to live and thus fight for their beliefs, to

give them better economic conditions. [...] Here, more than everywhere else, culture is a political fact. It can mean a respected life.'

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